Pentagon Concern on Lack Of Missile Defense Grows

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

The continuing development by the Soviet Union and Communist China of strategic missile systems is causing mounting concern among top military officers in the Pentagon.

The immediate start of a United States ballistic missile defense system — as a partial answer to the deployment of a Soviet system—has been unanimously urged by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a sharp split with the Johnson Administration. The issue has provoked some of the frankest language used by military officers to Congressional committees since Robert S. McNamara became Secretary of Defense in January, 1961.

The statistical background to the hitherto-muted military anxiety, which has now been brought into the open, explains the concern of the military leaders, even though the statistics themselves are under debate and intelligence appraisals of their meaning differ.

Soviet Effort Is Cited

The military appraisal of the expanding Soviet effort was summed up privately by one high-ranking officer in the Pentagon who is privy to all intelligence figures and estimates. He said that, in his opinion, if the United States and the Soviet Union continued their present programs without modification, the Russians would achieve near-parity with the United States in numbers of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles by 1970, and by that time would have surpassed the United States in the total weight of deliverable nuclear explosives and in defensive weapons.

Many other officers agree with this interpretation and say that the number of Soviet land-based intercontinental missiles is increasing at the rate of about 200 a year, that Moscow is building about four or five ballistic-missile submarines a year and is about to commission a new class of submarine with eight missile launchers and a longer-range misile, and that deployment of an extensive antiballistic missile system is still continuing.

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Some sources think that Communist China may fire its first test intercontinental missile later this year and that it will have an operational medium-range missile shortly.

These estimates are in sharp dispute within the intelligence community, and particularly between military and civilian authorities. A high Pentagon civilian official, saying that some intelligence estimates indicated the Soviet intercontinental missile program was tapering off, scouted the contention that the Russians would achieve parity with the United States in numbers of such missiles urged deferment of any decision to deploy a United States antimissile system and maintained that the United States military preferred smaller, lighter and "more accurate" nuclear weapons instead of the big-megaton bombs.

Early this year, Mr. McNamara, in an estimate to Congress, put the number of Soviet land-based intercontinental missiles at 340 as of Oct. 1, 1966, against 934 for the United States. United States submarine-launched ballistic missiles then numbered 512, he said, against an estimate of 130 for Russia.

He said that even by the early nineteen seventies the United States expected to have "a significant lead over the Soviet Union in terms of numbers and a very substantial superiority in terms of over-all combat effectiveness."

The military, especially intelligence officers, contend that this comparison is both optimistic and misleading—that it by no means tells the story.

Other Missiles Are Noted

A large number of winged missiles, for use against shipping, are carried by Soviet submarines, the ysay, and these can carry nuclear warheads and could be used for shore bombardment. These were not included in the estimate, they say. Nor were the 700 to 900 Soviet intermediate-range and medium-range missiles emplaced around Soviet frontiers, which have range enough to command most targets in Europe, Asia, North Africa, Alaska and some parts of Canada. Nor do the comparative statistics furnished by the secretary show the trend, which officers insist is in favor of the Soviet Union.

Relative to that of the United States, the Soviet missile capability, expressed in terms of numbers and payload, has increased and is increasing rapidly, they say, whereas the American program, about completed as far as numbers is concerned, is static, with the goal of 1,054 land-based intercontinental missiles and 656 submarine-launched missiles almost reached.

Some officers also insist that the current figures given by Mr. McNamara are not comprehensive, that at least 400 to 500 land launching sites have been identified in Russia, although not all of them are operational; that the expansion program is still continuing, and that, including "reloads" or additional missiles or spares for the same launchers, the Russians may have today as many as 800 long-range missiles in concrete underground silos, in semihardened installations and in "soft" surface sites.

Pentagon civilian officials concede that, expressed in terms of total deliverable tonnage of nuclear explosives, the Soviet Union has been steadily overtaking the United States. Soviet missiles carry heavier warheads than those of the United States.

The phasing out by the United States of many bombers, which carried the most powerful nuclear weapons, and the scrapping of the large 24-megaton bombs the bombers carried, has led to a marked reduction in the once-overwhelming United States lead in total weight of nuclear explosives.

Representative Craig Hosmer, Republican of California, estimated in a speech to the House of Representatives in January, 1966, that when the replacement of bombers by missiles had been completed, the United States' lead in terms of weight of deliverable nuclear explosives would be at the most 2.84 to 1 and perhaps as small as 1.26 to 1.

He pointed out that this ratio took no account of the development of Chinese nuclear weapons and was not comforting when plotted against the far larger land area and less densely populated regions of the Soviet Union.

Differing interpretations of the Soviet missile defense system also tend to complicate the Pentagon debate.

Two systems have been identified. One is around Moscow and to a lesser extent, around Leningrad. All intelligence agencies agree that this is a defense against ballistic missiles. But [illegible] elements of the intelligence community

have classified the second system—the Tallinn system, from the name of the Estonian capital—as a defense against aircraft or winged missiles.

The military dispute this contention and say that the Tallinn system is, or must be assumed to be, a ballistic missile defense system, and that it is extensive, almost nationwide. Like the Moscow system, they say, parts of it are already operational.

The length of time required to complete development and to manufacture and emplace a United States defensive system—a general area defense and a point defense for 25 cities—would be a minimum of five years from the date of decision and perhaps as much as eight years. Military officers believe the United States has reached the 11th hour, that long before 1972, China will have acquired a minimum nuclear delivery capability, if only from submarines, and that the Soviet Union may have achieved what amounts to parity or superiority in strategic weapons.

Military officers are further concerned over prospects that a decision on a United States system may be definitely delayed, while the Soviet system is being expanded, by United States-Soviet talks in Moscow.

At the direction of the President, Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson has suggested to Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin that it might be in the interest of both the United States and the Soviet Union to halt or freeze offensive and defensive strategic missile deployment.

An authoritative Washington source has described the exchanges as "preliminary."

McNamara Gives Views

At a news conference Thursday, Mr. McNamara said there had been "very little progress" in convincing the Soviet Union of the desirability of talks toward such a freeze.

He said it was necessary to "distinguish very carefully" between defense against a heavy attack, which both the Soviet Union and the United States are capable of delivering, and against a light attack, such as that China might be able to mount within a decade. He indicated that there was a possibility of an agreement permitting defenses against light attacks and barring those against heavy attacks.

Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, took issue with congressional testimony by Mr. McNamara to the effect that a defense system should not be deployed now. The general said that "failure to deploy" created "a strategic imbalance both within our forces and between the United States and Soviet forces."

"Deterrence is a combination of forces in being, and state of mind," he said. "Should the Soviets come to believe that their ballistic missile defense, coupled with a nuclear attack on the United States, would limit damage to the Soviet Union to a level acceptable to them whatever that level is, our forces would no longer deter."

Wants U.S. Superiority

General Wheeler said deployment was essential to "maintain the total strategic nuclear capability or balance clearly in favor of the United States."

This last remark, officers noted, was directed at a view first espoused and since strongly championed by the Cambridge Group. These scientists are led by Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner of The Massachusetts Institue of Technology, a science adviser to Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. They hold that deployment of a missile defense system represents a destabilizing factor in the world balance of power and means a step-up in the arms race.

They hold that parity or equality in strategic nuclear weapons could be a stabilizing factor. Some of them have advocated a freeze on the development and deployment of strategic nuclear weapons or a policy of deliberate restraint on the part of the United States in order to allow the Soviet Union to achieve equality.

In addition to this influence, other factors that have tended to stop or delay the deployment of a defense system have been the economic pressures of the Vietnamese war, the differing opinions in the intelligence community about the extent and the capabilities of the Soviet and Chinese strategic programs, and the fear that any system deployed now might be technologically outdated in five years.